# THE CELEBRATED CASES OF DICK TRACY

CHESTER GOULD

**Introduction by Ellery Queen**

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CHESTER
GOULD

# The Celebrated Cases of DICK TRACY

"MOLE"

FLATTOP

BREATHLESS MAHONEY

The early 1930's witnessed the emergence of the action and suspense comic strips such as "Tarzan" and "Buck Rogers." In 1931 Chester Gould, a journeyman newspaper artist submitted samples of a new cartoon strip featuring a city detective to Captain Joseph Patterson, head of the *Chicago Tribune-New York News* Syndicate. Captain Patterson bought the idea, changing the name of the strip from "Plainclothes Tracy" to "Dick Tracy" —and a new era of realism hit the cartoon page.

On Sunday, October 4, 1931 Dick Tracy appeared for the first time in the *Detroit Mirror*, and now after almost four decades it is still followed intently by millions of readers throughout the world. Tracy, a detective in a large American city that might possibly be Chicago, is assisted in his early career by the ever faithful Pat Patton (now Police Chief) and his adopted, often kidnapped, son, Junior. With this help, the eagle-beaked, square-chinned lawman is more than a match for the gangsters, blackmailers, murderers, swindlers, and spies that continually plague the public.

The murder of Tess Trueheart's father spurs Tracy to join "Chief" Brandon's plainclothes department. One action-filled month later, Ribs Mocco is brought to justice. Behind Ribs Mocco lurks Big Boy (and anybody who remembers Chicago in the early 30's knows who that refers to), and Tracy continues the pursuit. He has found his life's work.

*THE CELEBRATED CASES OF DICK TRACY: 1931-1951* is a collection of episodes featuring the most notorious criminals of this period: Ribs Mocco; The Blank, a faceless killer; a midget lawyer Jerome Trohs and Mamma; Little Face Finny; The Mole, who naturally lives underground; B. B. Eyes, a tire bootlegger (yes, kids, there were such things!); piano player 88 Keyes and Nellie, an early "groupie"; Flattop, a killer for hire;

*(continued on back flap)*

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# Interview with Chester Gould

*Q:* What can you tell us about your early days?

*Gould:* I was born in Oklahoma and my grandfather on my mother's side was one of the men that made the trek into Oklahoma to stake out a claim. His name was Riley Miller. He took his family there in 1892 and built a log cabin which is still standing. It's not very sturdy but it's there. On my father's side, my grandfather Gould was a minister who moved west from West Virginia. My own father was a printer and eventually the owner of a weekly newspaper. It was probably that influence which got me into the frame of mind to become a cartoonist.

I remember very well one time when I was seven. My dad was then editing a weekly newspaper and there was to be a Pawnee County, Oklahoma political meeting. He said, "Would you like to draw some of the men at this meeting?" Well, you can imagine how good my efforts must have been at that age. But I went over and turned out a bunch of stuff; they pasted it up in the window of the Pawnee *Courier Dispatch,* which was located right next to the post office. Everybody walked to the post office for the mail, so they had to pass my drawings. I got considerable attention and I think it's perhaps the thing that definitely turned me into this business. I have been at it since 1907.

*Q:* What were some of your favorite cartoons in those days?

*Gould:* Head and shoulders above everything else was "Mutt and Jeff." It was brand new and my father used to buy the Oklahoma City *Daily Oklahoman* just so that I could read "Mutt and Jeff." "Buster Brown" was big then too. So was "Little Nemo," and "Slim Jim."

*Q:* Did you finish your schooling in Oklahoma?

*Gould:* I went to Oklahoma A&M College for two years, and then moved on to Chicago in 1921 and finished up a four-year course in commerce and marketing at Northwestern University. I went to night school in the Loop and supported myself drawing cartoons and doing commercial work. Up to the time I started "Dick Tracy" in '31 I had worked on every paper in Chicago except the *Evening Post,* which went bankrupt or I probably would have ended up working on that too. However, I came to Chicago with the intent of getting on the *Tribune.* That was my goal.

*Q:* When you started Tracy, did you feel that it was a story about the times or was it just a good story line?

*Gould:* What was taking place then was the last stage, you might say, of big-time gangsterism in Chicago. I had submitted numerous ideas to the *Tribune* and to Captain Joe Patterson of the *Tribune* syndicate from 1921 until 1931 on various subjects. I found that none of them quite clicked. Then it suddenly dawned on me that perhaps we ought to have a detective in this country that would hunt these fellows up and shoot 'em down. So I developed this character called "Plainclothes Tracy."

*Q:* When you submitted the Tracy idea to Patterson, what was his reaction?

*Gould:* The Captain wired me from New York saying that he liked the idea and that I should get started on it. Only he said the name was too long and suggested I change it to "Dick Tracy." In fact, I owe everything that came to me in those days to the faith that J. M. Patterson had in this strip.

*Q:* Did Patterson contribute other ideas to the strip?

*Gould:* Yes, for the first year he came about once a month to contact cartoonists who were in Chicago and ask about their progress on their latest strips. After talking with us he would invariably have something to contribute—a story outline, a finale to a plot. He had a fantastic mind. He could talk to five cartoonists and give everyone of them a terrific idea.

*Q:* But you did have a few strips published prior to "Dick Tracy?"

*Gould:* Yes, for five years I did a strip for Hearst's *American.* It was a burlesque on the movies called "Fillum Fables," but I cannot claim originality for it. We already had a very capable man doing a strip like that—"Minute Movies" by Ed Wheelan.

*Q:* Wasn't that an era when newspapers really realized how important the cartoonists were in selling the papers.

*Gould:* That's true. And it is also true today. I believe that the biggest pulling magnet of newspapers today are comic strips.

*Q:* What was the immediate reaction of the public to your strip?

*Gould:* Like all things new, it took a couple of months to catch on. Then it grew like wildfire. The salesmen would call me up and say, "We got two new orders this morning." There would be two or three orders a day for many, many days. However, from the very beginning I would receive letters saying what a "horrible" strip I was doing.



*Q:* From individuals or organizations?

*Gould:* Mostly from individuals. Now I am used to it and take it with a grain of salt. They don't annoy me one whit any more. The odd thing about them, however, is that they would often describe in detail the "horrible things." I figured that they were the types who couldn't wait until the next day to see how a particular thing turned out.

*Q:* What about the reaction of police departments? Did they feel that Tracy was providing a good image?

*Gould:* I have in my home no less than a dozen citations and awards from police departments. I also had the privilege of spending some time with J. Edgar Hoover in the mid-30's.

*Q:* Do people today ever acknowledge that Dick Tracy influenced them in their youth?

*Gould:* Yes, I run into that very often, and I think that we all build our lives around heroes. I don't care how sophisticated you are, you want to be like somebody you respect, someone you may not quite equal but would like to equal. The boy naturally is inclined to pick the hero type that wins out over danger and risk. The girl, on the other hand, wants to win out as the misunderstood girl, one who is pure of heart and sweet, who wins the prince and all the money. This is still the basic reality of all humanity. I don't care whether it is a Yippie in the streets or a corporation president—he maintains those visions and those ideals in his mind.

*Q:* Do you plan far in advance how Tracy will actually catch the criminal?

*Gould:* I don't outline the whole story when I start. I feel if I don't know how it is going to come out, then the reader can't, and if you keep enough punch and enough interest, the intervening ground seems to be covered automatically.

*Q:* Do you think that Tracy in the early 30's influenced other media, such as the police procedural story in radio, movies, and novels.

*Gould:* Yes, but please excuse me if I seem to be a little biased. I feel that Dick Tracy has set a pattern for much of the very excellent entertainment in crime detection and police work. And I think the strip has definitely been a tremendous influence in the lives of the writers who have worked in these media.

*Q:* Were the mystery novels of Dashiell Hammett or any of the other authors of the hard-boiled school of writing an influence on you?

*Gould:* No, I got most of my inspiration from a boyhood love of Sherlock Holmes. I was also a great follower of Edgar Allen Poe. I didn't follow many of the so-called "popular" things that came in after "Dick Tracy." I followed the newspapers almost exclusively—the police news and all information about the operation of gangsters and the war against them. And it really is a war that the police are constantly engaged in.

*Q:* Do you see any comparison between the crimes of today and the crimes of the early 30's? Do you think there is any basic difference? In your early strips, one of the recurring crimes was kidnaping, and that seems less troublesome today.

*Gould:* I think there is one very good reason why that has pretty much subsided. Because of federal law you've got the Army, the Navy, and the United States Government looking for you when you kidnap somebody. This is not a little two-buck deal, like cracking a safe. Consequently, there are certain crimes that I feel have diminished automatically because of the potential punishment and pursuit that the criminal gets himself into.

*Q:* Criminals have come and gone—do you have any theories about why somebody goes wrong today? Some people say that poverty makes a criminal, but then again, criminals come from the wealthier classes too.

*Gould:* You know I don't buy too much of this. I'm not going to get into any discussion of the social situation, but I will say this: Abraham Lincoln had to do his figures on the back of a shovel with a piece of charcoal. He only got to be President.

*Q:* Later on in the 50's you went into science fiction—the trip to the moon, and the Moon-Maid. Why did you go in this direction?

*Gould:* Under no conditions did I consider this science fiction. I considered it a ramification of the potential that we are most definitely going to have to face as we explore space. We haven't scratched the surface yet. For one thing, we have got to get rid of this horse-and-buggy rocket. This thing is perhaps the biggest deterrent to real space exploration that we'll ever have. Will it go to the moon? Yes, of course. But here is a thing that involves such complications, such favorable conditions, such breathtakingly narrow margins of safety, that it must be thrown out of permanent space exploration. We have to get speed into our space transportation. The idea of taking days to go to the moon almost prohibits the practical use of the whole mission. We're going to



have stations on the moon exactly like Diet Smith had them. They will be built of material that will withstand the extreme cold and heat. They will be perhaps 90 per cent underground. We will have colonies up there. I think there are things on the moon that will make it practical to be stationed there. And you can be sure, just as sure as we sit here, that we're going to have to protect what we are going to find up there. It's going to be exactly like it was when the New World was explored. Everything is going to be pirated away from the weaklings. There is going to be a very definite need to exercise power.

I was imaginative in producing people that lived there, however. I have not been completely cleared of the thought that there still may be inhabitants underground, or somewhere where they can live, such as down in a deep ravine, a place like Moon Valley. But I am sure that moon travel is here to stay and that we are going to have to get away from rockets, either through magnetic attraction or through some sort of atomic propulsion that has endless power at its command—something that is manageable. Something that won't keep the Army and the Navy and fifty thousand technicians with their fingers crossed, hoping the rocket touches ground.

*Q:* Well, can we get back to earth now and sort of go back a few years? In the early strips you drew grotesque criminals—was there any particular reason for doing this?

*Gould:* I wanted my villains to stand out definitely so that there would be no mistake who the villain was. I once received a letter from a person asking, "Why do you make your criminals so ugly?" I never looked at them as being ugly, but I'll tell you this. I think the ugliest thing in the world is the face of a man who has killed seven nurses—or who has kidnapped a child. His face to me is ugly. Or a man who has raped an old lady or young girl and robbed her of $3.40. I think this is an ugly man.

*Q:* We talked about the bootleggers and the Al Capones of that era. Today we don't have that kind of crime but there still is a Mafia in this country. Do you think there is an improvement in that particular area? Or have the kinds of crimes changed?

*Gould:* Well, I think our whole criminal problem has gotten bigger. I think the little innocent street gangs are now using the tactics employed by the Capones and their hoodlums years ago. I think that through certain court decisions the police have definitely been hamstrung, and I think there has been a psychology that has predominated

and there was a very great need for furnishing relief from the damn headlines.

*Q:* One of the memorable parts of Tracy's life was his romance with Tess Trueheart. He finally married Tess after 18 years. Was there any motivating force for that event?

*Gould:* There is nothing significant at all. They were married in 1949 on Christmas Eve.

*Q:* Well, after they were married Tess withdrew to the background and another girl joined the force—Liz.

*Gould:* She is still the right-hand girl of the police department.

*Q:* Do you feel that this is a reflection that the wife's place is in the home?

*Gould:* No, you have to have policewomen. You can't handle a woman prisoner without a policewoman, and of course she's the only one we played up. Once in a while we show Liz and a uniformed policewoman working together, escorting a girl or a prisoner. She furnishes the female relief.

*Q:* What about Sam Catchem? Is he going to continue?

*Gould:* Yes, Sam will be there. In fact we have a nice deal coming up on him. You can only have one hero at a time in a story (there can't be two heroes or two heroines). Anyway I've read many letters asking why I don't let Sam Catchem do more. Why, hell, Sam Catchem is probably doing more than Tracy is, but the point is that our strip is Dick Tracy. We have to play Dick Tracy up.



# Introduction:

## *The Importance of Being Earnest; or, The Survival of the Finest*

*Dear Reader:*

October 4, 1931.

What was the state of crime in the United States during the weekend of October 3-4, 1931?

It was terrifying.

The enactment of the 18th Amendment, which had become effective more than a decade before, on January 16, 1920, and the passing of the Volstead Act for the enforcement of Prohibition, effective the next day, January 17, 1920, had triggered a National Crime Wave.

The stock market crash—a tremor on October 24, 1929 and a quake heard round the world on October 29, 1929—had triggered the Great Depression, and in its aftermath all the widespread criminal activities such a disaster breeds.

But let us look at the headlines and news stories of that October 3-4 weekend in 1931.

In New York, in a daring daylight raid, three armed men invaded the home of Deputy Police Commissioner Barron Collier and carried off a 150-pound safe containing jewels and other valuables.

A bomb exploded in a Bronx garage as dry men seized Dutch Schultz's beer.

In Brooklyn a grape truckdriver was found slain with a hatchet.

In a Monroe Street shop an undertaker's assistant was brutally murdered. The victim, his family admitted, had been making illicit liquor and was also believed to have been a collector for an East Side lottery.

In Chicago, on October 3, a football crowed jeered gang-leader Scarface Al Capone at the Northwestern-Nebraska game held in Evanston, Illinois. Capone was accompanied by his usual bodyguard of eight men and by Jack McGurn, the notorious machine gunner. (In the crowd a band of Boy Scouts ran around Capone yelling: "Yea-a-a, Al!") Capone was on trial before Federal Judge James H. Wilkerson on charges on income-tax violations—the climax to three years of investigation by the Government in an effort to rid Chicago of its Public Enemy Number One. The trial was regarded as the most important of all prosecutions of gang chieftains produced by the Prohibition era. The customary procedures would be taken against any possible attempt to assassinate Capone or some of the Government witnesses.

In New York alone, 54 homicide cases were awaiting trial, and in a vicious gun battle upstate, Vincent Coll and his gang were arrested as baby killers.

And in *The New York Times* there appeared an article titled "After All, Why Do Men Like to Drink?" by James Truslow Adams whose book, *The Epic of America,* had the lead review in that Sunday's edition, the

review titled "America, Nation of Dreamers: In That Quality Mr. Adams Finds the Key to Our History."

So much for the state of Prohibition and crime on October 3-4, 1931. How about the economic and sociological state of the union? The headlines and news stories reported that—

The Pope was urging aid for the unemployed, and 75 business heads had joined in a relief drive.

In Chicago, 2000 payless schoolteachers, most of them women, cried out: "How can we buy food?"

Curb prices were still sinking, many to new lows, and the Chamber of Commerce of the United States was urging the Stock Exchange to limit short selling.

Strikebreakers and union men had rioted on Boston's docks.

Income-tax collections, Washington reported, had fallen $231 million in September.

More than 50 hospitals were facing huge 1931 deficits.

Payrolls were down 40 per cent since 1925, only six years ago.

"All over the United States banks were collapsing," wrote Walter Lippmann.

It was terrifying.

A few bright spots? Yes, there always are—if you look for them. Canon Dimnet called the Depression a "blessing in disguise." Society reported that 4000 persons attended the closing events of the Piping Rock horse show (while more than 10 million were jobless). The new Nash automobile was advertised for $795, the new Willys-Knight for $845. Marie Dressler and Lionel Barrymore were nominated for, and eventually they won, the "traditional statuettes of merit" (not yet called the Oscars). Henry Clay Frick, coke and steel pioneer, gave his mansion and art collection, valued at $50 million, to the public.

All that and more was happening.

But something else happened on October 4, 1931.

In its own way, an epic event.

In its own way, of lasting significance.

In its own way, a turning point in America.

A long-overdue counterattack.

Dick Tracy was born.

Dick Tracy was created by Chester Gould, a concerned citizen living in the Chicago area at the time. He was born in Pawnee, Oklahoma, on November 20, 1900. He had his first "professional" drawings pasted up on the window of the Pawnee *Courier Dispatch* at the age of seven—and he has been drawing ever since.



By the time he was graduated from high school in 1919, he had already taken a correspondence-school course in cartooning. His father, Gilbert Gould, publisher of a weekly newspaper, the Stillwater, Oklahoma *Advance-Democrat,* wanted Chester to become a lawyer. But Chester was committed to his life work. His father said, "Well, if you are going to be an artist, get an education; an artist without one usually dies poor." Impressed by this wisdom, Chester spent two years at Oklahoma A & M College; then with a total capital of $50 he moved to Chicago and finished his education in commerce and marketing at Northwestern University, meanwhile going to art school at night and supporting himself by drawing cartoons and doing commercial artwork.

In 1921, while still at school, he made his first submission to Captain Joseph Medill Patterson of the *Chicago Tribune-New York News* syndicate. For the next 10 years he bombarded Patterson with more than 60 comic-strip ideas—"trying everything: the beautiful girl strip, the office boy, the smart aleck, the oddball, the believe-it-or-not cartoon, even a comic feature on sports; but none of them," as Gould expresses it, "quite clicked." (You don't have to look far to find the source of Dick Tracy's determination and persistence.) Then one hot day in August 1931, while he was drawing a highly detailed Oriental rug for an advertisement, a telegram from Patterson changed Chester Gould's life. The prosaic Oriental-rug illustration was abandoned. Instead, at Patterson's request, and averaging only two hours of sleep a night for two weeks, Gould drew a month and a half of the comic strip that had finally grabbed Patterson. It was a new concept, and the first Sunday page appeared on October 4, 1931 in the *Detroit Mirror,* a tabloid owned by the *Chicago Tribune-New York News.*[1]

Thus Dick Tracy, symbol of law and order, of authority and justice, was born—"the daddy of all cops-and-robbers strips," as Stephen Becker puts it in *Comic Art in America* (1959).[2]

Gould originally called his character and strip "Plainclothes Tracy," but Patterson, with his unerring instinct for what grabbed the public, streamlined the name and title to "Dick Tracy." Dick? Probably because it was the best-known slang word for detective, and therefore the most appropriate given name. Tracy? Probably because the supersleuth was always tracing down his man.

Dick Tracy was something brand-new in comics. He broke the rules, dared to flout the taboos. "Back in 1931," says Gould, "no cartoon had ever shown a detective character fighting it out face to face with crooks via the hot lead route." Now in 1931, for the first time, comics actually showed murder, kidnaping, bloody fist fights, gory gunplay—"foul crime in detail," with all its shocking brutality.

There were misgivings, of course, on the part of newspapers and complaints from readers about the "immorality" of the strip. "It took a couple of months to catch on," Gould recalls, "then it grew like wildfire." And has been growing ever since. Readers' complaints are rare now, and official recognition has come to Dick Tracy's creator, including more than a dozen citations and awards from police departments, and the praise of J. Edgar Hoover.

Today, after 39 years of continuous comic-strip action, after a radio show, after movie serials and feature pictures (starring Ralph Byrd and Morgan Conway), and a television cartoon series, after a long line of commercial tie-ups,[3] Dick Tracy is at the peak of his popularity and success, carried in more than 600 newspapers throughout the world (*Time*, June 28, 1968, gave the figure as 800) with an estimated circulation of 50 million and a readership of at least twice that—100 million fans!

We once wrote about The Master Detective who wears a deerstalker and an Inverness cape (to the best of our recollection Sir Arthur Conan Doyle actually called them an "ear-flapped cap" and a "long gray travelling-cloak"): "Who can ever forget that tall, excessively lean man with his razorlike face and hawk's-bill of a nose . . . or the way he paced up and down that legendary room at 221B Baker Street, quickly, eagerly, his head sunk upon his chest . . . or the way he examined the scene of a crime, sometimes on all fours, his nose to the ground . . . that gaunt, dynamic figure and his incisive speech. . . ."

Compare that with a description of Dick Tracy—for in Chester Gould's mind Dick Tracy was a modernized and idealized Sherlock Holmes, the All-American boy grown up, dressed in snap-brim hat, natty striped tie, and black sack suit, whose private life is perpetually Spartan—Dick Tracy doesn't drink (he gave up smoking early in his career) and the nearest he ever comes to swearing is something like "an out-and-out alias or my name's Jeremiah!" "Who can ever forget" that tall, four-square man with his jutting (meat-chopper bulldozer) chin, his grim mouth and tight-lipped smile, his eagle's-beak of a nose . . . that absolutely honest and incorruptible defender of the faith with his Rock of Gibraltar sense of duty[4] . . . with not a soft line in his character or appearance . . . or the way he pounced, pummeled, pursued . . . or the way *he* examined the scene of a crime . . . that true-blue, indomitable, granite-featured figure and his vigorous, slangy, crisply emphatic speech . . . that iron-willed man who, ahead of his time, was never uptight, who never blew his cool.

The real-life inspiration for Dick Tracy was the state of law and order in America, especially in the big cities. In the decade preceding the birth of Dick Tracy, while the detective's character and purpose were bubbling in Chester Gould's creative cauldron, gunmen and racketeers had



become, in Frederick Lewis Allen's phrase, "a national institution." A tidal wave of crime and corruption had all but submerged the big cities of this country. Chicago had been in the vanguard, but no metropolis had remained immune—New York, Detroit, San Francisco, Los Angeles, everywhere gangsterism was rampant.

The proximate cause was Prohibition. There were contributing causes (more likely to be called "symptoms" now)—confession and sex magazines, lurid movies, and the proliferation of the automobile, especially the closed car; but most historians have placed the chief blame on Prohibition.

But while the fanatical advocates of temperance had won an unbelievable victory (both when it happened and in retrospect), even unto a constitutional amendment, John Q. Public had not been reformed. Free men and women, living in an avowed democracy, decided they had the unalienable right to drink—not only water but hard liquor—and not even the Government, with a capital G, could prohibit their drinking. So, no sooner had Prohibition become the law of the land—almost, one might say, instantaneously—the people began to evade the law, then to disregard it so flagrantly, both in the letter and the spirit (no pun intended), that violating the 18th Amendment and the Volstead Act became a national pastime.

The danger in breaking one law—openly, and worse, with impunity—is the chain reaction that inexorably follows: the breaking of other laws. The populace wanted beer and booze, and beer and booze were what they got. If demand comes, can supply be far behind?

Enter, then, the bootlegger—and in almost less time than it takes to say it, the bootlegger became a romantic, even a glorified figure to a multitude of otherwise law-abiding citizens. It was not entirely an unprecedented phenomenon in American life. Americans have always had a weakness for regarding certain lawbreakers as folk heroes. (In some ways that weakness has persisted to this day.) But the demand for distilled and fermented beverages was so widespread, so urgent, that the neighborhood bootlegger, a comparatively small operator, could not supply that demand. His role quickly formed into that of a middleman.

Enter, then the Big Boys—Organized Crime. And in Chicago (now Chester Gould's home grounds) Johnny Torrio took over as early as 1920. But even he proved not big enough—or tough enough or ruthless enough or cynical enough. The man supposed to be Torrio's lieutenant, one Alphonse Capone, became the czar of bootlegging, and before he was finally sent to Alcatraz for income tax evasion—not long after Dick Tracy's debut as a crimebuster—he was the acknowledged kingpin of gambling, vice, and the rackets. Break one law and all laws become vulnerable.

Let us take a kaleidoscope-montage look at the 10 years of crime

during which Chester Gould sought and found his colorful pen-and-ink hero. Your memory will fill in the historical collage, and the names and words will evoke images of the criminal Life and Times of the United States, 1920-1931.

The Hall-Mills murder case. The Sacco-Vanzetti *cause célèbre.* The bull market on Wall Street, encouraging recklessness, false values, self-indulgence.

The Problem of the Younger Generation (sound familiar?).

Speakeasies—10,000 in Chicago alone.

"The world is crumbling" (sound familiar?).

Scandal, political corruption in high places, Teapot Dome.

Skyrocketing stock market: Radio Corporation of America—a 1928 low of 85¼, a 1929 high of 549. (By November 13, 1929 RCA had dropped to 28, by 1932 to a low of 2½.)

Great God Business. Great God Money—and nothing smaller than millions.

Leopold and Loeb trial. Florida real estate boom—and bust. *Homo boobiens* (H. L. Mencken's phrase).

Prohibition: rum-ships, smuggling ("just off the boat")—hijacking, Thompson sub-machine guns ("typewriters"), illegal stills ("alky-cooking"), hip flasks, "Joe sent me," "noble experiment" (President Hoover's phrase), taken "for a ride," "rubbing out," thugs, torpedoes, heisters, hoodlums.

In 1927 alone, according to Fred D. Pasley, Al Capone's biographer, the Capone gang's income amounted to $105 million ($60 million from beer and liquor, $25 million from gambling, $10 million from vice, dance-halls, roadhouses, $10 million from rackets). By 1929 there were 91 different rackets in Chicago, with an estimated total cost to the citizenry of $150 million a year.

Bribery, "fixed" juries, politicians (including judges) in the crooks' pockets ("everybody greased from the big shots down"), graft, conspiracy, extortion, "protection," arson, bombing.

St. Valentine's Day massacre (February 14, 1929).

The stock market hit its 1929 bottom on November 13. "In a few short weeks the crash had blown into thin air 30 *billion* dollars[5]—a sum almost as great as the entire cost to the United States of its participation in the (First) World War, and nearly twice as great as the entire national debt."

Panic. Depression. By 1930 one out of every four factory employees was out of work. Bootleggers were openly doing business in the Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. Enforcement of Prohibition was "a mockery."



Depression widening, deepening. Jobless men, exhausted savings, relief (if any funds were available), bankruptcies, smokeless factory chimneys, beggars and panhandlers, breadlines and soup kitchens, "Hoovervilles" (communities of squatters living in makeshift shacks on vacant city lots), cardboard insoles to cover holes in shoes, able-bodied men selling apples on street corners, hunger, disillusionment, despair.

And the despair finding its outlet in violence and crime.

A poll of the "paramount problems of the United States" taken the same year Dick Tracy was born rated the major problems as: No. 1: Prohibition. No. 2: Administration of Justice. No. 3: Lawlessness.[6]

All these ingredients stewed and brewed until the melting pot of life in America boiled over.

District Attorney Crain of New York: "Racketeers have their hands on everything from the cradle to the grave—from babies' milk to funeral coaches."

And in those ten years Chester Gould had been saying to himself: "Why can't they get those birds? Why, say, if I were a cop, I'd shoot them right down on the spot." Still quoting Mr. Gould: "The public demand was for less red tape, more direct action in dealing with criminals."

So Chester Gould, concerned citizen and artist,[7] did something about it. And inevitably what he did reflected the hard, tough times that had America in its gangster grip. Chester Gould produced a contemporary knight in shining armor who was ready, willing, and able to fight the criminal with, if necessary, the criminal's own weapons, to fight the toughs with equal or even greater toughness. Chester Gould created Dick Tracy to meet the desperate need of the times. Dick Tracy's job was to regain the almost vanished respect for the law and to be the instrument of his enforcement. As Gould once said in an interview: "I decided that if the police couldn't catch the gangsters, I'd create a fellow who would."

The second major influence on the creation of Dick Tracy was a new literary form emerging during the 1920's in the United States. It is said that "Art imitates Nature," and this new literary form mirrored real life. Its style and substance sprang directly from the national crimino-economic condition, transforming (more precisely, translating) the brutality and violence, the poverty and despair, into fiction. And like its real-life source it was a uniquely American product. We know it now as the hardboiled detective-action story.[8]

In March 1920 H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan founded a pulp magazine they called "The Black Mask"; but they quickly got bored with it—they had seemingly bigger fish to fry—and sold out for a profit. Under its first editor, F. M. Osborne, "The Black Mask" was a typical pulp. But when George W. Sutton, Jr., ably assisted by Harry North, took

over the editorship in October 1922, Prohibition was nearly three years old and the human condition was no longer an ominous outline. The grotesque features in the face of crime were now clearly visible.

Sutton and North, who were early exponents of "telling it like it is," began to develop a kind of fiction that exposed the criminal life and times of "the land of the free and the home of the brave." It is significant that Sutton bought and published the first crime-detective stories written by Dashiell Hammett, Carroll John Daly, and Erle Stanley Gardner whose characters were, in Philip Durham's phrase, "rugged individualists righting social wrongs." The new style, according to William F. Nolan, was "bitter, tough, unsentimental, uncompromisingly realistic, reflecting the violence of its time . . . a bare-knuckles approach."

In April 1924, Phil Cody became the editor of "The Black Mask," and with him, Erle Stanley Gardner has said, "the action type of detective story took a long strike forward." There was plenty of real-life action to draw on: Capone treating the police of Chicago as if they were Keystone Cops; Dion O'Banion's funeral, gangster-style—a $10,000 casket and 26 truckloads of flowers, including one modest wreath with a card signed "From Al"; the capers of Bugs Moran, Hymie Weiss, Three-Gun Alterie. A Chicago reporter wrote: "We are living by the code of the Dark Ages."

In November 1926, Joseph "Cap" T. Shaw undertook the cultivation of "Black Mask" (the "The" was dropped, a small indication of Shaw's insistence on economy of expression), and under his editorship "Black Mask" reached its fullest flower in capturing "the illusion of reality," in portraying characters who talked tough and, more important to the truth of the times, acted tough. Shad had "meditated on the possibility of creating a new type of detective story," and he had searched among the contributors to "The Black Mask" for a special spark of originality. He chose as leader of "a new school in writing" an ex-Pinkerton agent, Dashiell Hammett, who like Ernest Hemingway had been "trying to make fictional events truer than life." Hammett became "the ace performer" (Raymond Chandler's later appraisal), and, quoting William F. Nolan again, "Hammett brilliantly defined the troubled aspects of the period of open criminal warfare, poverty, and festering political corruption."

So the stage was set for Chester Gould's creation of Dick Tracy: in real life, the national crime wave caused first by Prohibition and then by the Great Depression; in literature, "Black Mask" and such "drawn from life" books as Hammett's *Red Harvest, The Dain Curse, The Maltese Falcon,* and such mainstream novels as W. R. Burnett's *Little Caesar* and William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*. Whether or not Chester Gould ever read "Black Mask" in the decade before Dick Tracy's birth in print, or read books by the hardboiled writers of the 20's, he knew what was going on



—not only in real life but in the "intensely concerned, emotionally aroused" (editor Shaw), "fast, terse narratives" (Ron Goulart) that were reflecting "this action-filled rawness, this world of lusty hoodlumism" (Jules Feiffer). Gould *felt* it—it had been growing in him for 10 years. It was in the climate. No citizen who gave a damn in those days could be oblivious of it. The time had come—it was almost too late—to restore law and order, to reestablish authority and justice. The time had come for Race Williams, The Continental Op, Sam Spade—and Dick Tracy.

Now, just what kind of detective is Dick Tracy? Where does he fit in the mystery genre? We know he is the father of the detective comic strip —but what is his place in the larger field of fictional detection? Was he influential not only as a crimino-cultural force but as a crimino-literary force?

Well, we began to dig into the Dick Tracy canon, to refresh our faded memories. And we learned something we had never even suspected. Dick Tracy *is* important in mystery-story history—he was a "first," a genuine "first." We came up with a startling discovery.

Most of us consider Dick Tracy strictly an action-detective as handy with his fists as with his gun; a rugged, hardboiled detective who can, as Chester Gould intended, take everything the criminals dish out and dish it right back—sometimes in spades. But the truth is, Dick Tracy is more than just a ball of fire in furious action. When you renew your acquaintance with him in the comics reproduced in this volume, you will find that Dick Tracy is a thinking detective too, that surprisingly he combines the "intellectual" school with the "physical," and that he is a proficient craftsman of true-life police techniques.

Exactly how does Dick Tracy detect? He is, of course, a determined and persistent legman. He investigates and interrogates. But technically he goes far beyond the usual limits of action-detection. Let's look at the printed record.

Dick Tracy introduced the two-way wrist radio, in the strip of January 21, 1946. When it first appeared, the two-way wrist radio was science-fictional; today it is science-factual.

Dick Tracy was the first to make use of television as a means of crime detection. He was the first to use closed-circuit television (which he called "teleguard") to monitor possible criminal activities, and the first to adapt television as a burglar alarm.

In his 39 years of crime-fighting, Dick Tracy's methods have been mental as well as muscular, deductive as well as dynamic. His techniques have included the newest procedures known to science in the identification of fingerprints ("bringing them out with the iodine blowgun" or "lifting

them by the wet-film process"). He is expert enough in his job to look for fingerprints in seemingly unlikely places—on a victim's fingernails, for example, where the killer's prints might have been left if there had been a struggle, or on a car's rearview mirror where prints might have been left if the criminal had absent-mindedly adjusted the mirror. And Tracy is no less professional in identification through footprints.

You will learn that Dick Tracy is completely at home in a police laboratory, completely expert in the use of chemistry, telescope camera, lie detector, microscope, magnifying glass (or jeweler's loupe), and other scientific tools. His "hunches" turn out to be based on keen observation of minutiae. He is thoroughly skilled in such non-action detection as ballistics and handwriting analysis, is capable of shrewd psychological experiments, and he knows police-department regulations and F.B.I. textbooks by heart. He answers an official summons by helicopter, and is always one of the first, if not the first, to take advantage of every innovation in police procedure—for instance, in 1937, the "use of the tracer bullet in making a capture in a darkened room."

The whole picture of Dick Tracy's daily battle with crime is "a realistic picture of modern police work" (to quote Robert M. Yoder). Chester Gould has been called "a perfectionist who takes pride in the accuracy and researching" of even the most minute details, and as a result there are no unsolved crimes in Dick Tracy's casebook.

Now what does all this add up to? We tend to remember Dick Tracy's fisticuffs, gunshots ("rat-tat-tat"), frantic chases, and "old movie-serial" cliffhangers, and tend to forget his resourceful on-the-scene and laboratory techniques. And the part we tend to forget is an important aspect of Dick Tracy the detective—the aspect that stamps him a procedural detective as much as an action-detective. As George Perry and Alan Aldridge wrote in *The Penguin Book of Comics,* "The criminals and crimes in Dick Tracy may be wildly exaggerated; his police work is sound and orthodox."

Where, then, does Dick Tracy rank in the line of fiction's procedural detectives? In prose (that is, in books and magazines) we have established the chronological order of procedural detectives. In their own times many fictional sleuths operated in essence as procedural detectives. For examples: Emile Gaboriau's Lecoq (1866) whose methods were, by today's standards, rather primitive; the various detectives who never slept and whose exploits, chiefly imagined, were chronicled by Allan Pinkerton (1874); R. Austin Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke (1907) whose scientific modus operandi is still valid; Freeman Wills Crofts's Inspector French (1924) whose cases emphasized legwork and painstaking investigation; and a cogent argument can be advanced that William MacHarg's O'Malley started the modern procedural *trend*—his "affairs" began to appear in



*Collier's* magazine in 1932. But it is generally agreed that Lawrence Treat made the most significant contribution to the development of the contemporary police-procedural in prose. It was his novel, *V As in Victim* (1945)—10 years ahead of J. J. Marric's (John Creasey's) first Commander Gideon novel, *Gideon's Day,* and 11 years ahead of Ed McBain's first 87th Precinct novel, *Cop Hater*—in which the police-procedural came of age. In reviewing Treat's first procedural story the late Anthony Boucher wrote: "In its unpretentious way, this may be an epoch-making book, marking a fresh, new, realistic approach to police procedure." And later Mr. Boucher wrote: "The prime pioneer in the naturalistic novel of police procedure was Lawrence Treat whose stories were not only far ahead of their times but admirable in themselves."

Where, then, does Dick Tracy fit in this order? Dick Tracy first appeared in print on October 4, 1931—*one year ahead* of MacHarg, the trend-maker; *14 years ahead* of Treat, the "prime pioneer"; *24 years ahead* of Marric (Creasey); *25 years ahead* of McBain. Now bear in mind that Dick Tracy was not conceived to be a vigilante or a private eye. Actually, Captain Patterson instructed Chester Gould to "start him off as an ordinary young fellow who has dedicated himself to the pursuit of thugs who have murdered the father of the girl he loves; after he succeeds in bringing them to justice, turn him into a professional police officer." So in the beginning, for only the first few weeks of his career, Dick Tracy was a "hard-hitting amateur who dealt with criminals with fists, blackjack, or gun; his prowess won him an appointment as a city detective," a member of the plainclothes squad.

Nor was Dick Tracy, in the historical sequence of fictional sleuths, the first action-detective or the first hardboiled detective. But he was, as we have shown—and this is the startling discovery—the world's first procedural detective of fiction, in the modern sense. And the discovery is even more startling when we realize that the world's first procedural detective made his debut not in prose but in pictures, that he entered the mainstream of the mystery genre not in a book or magazine but in a newspaper.

A newspaper comic strip is not that far removed from book or magazine fiction. All the elements of fiction are present in the comic strip: story line, characterization, exposition, dialogue (usually in "balloons"), conflict, development of plot, denouement—all enhanced, in the comic strip, by concrete visualization. Chester Gould has said that he "considers himself a teller of tales"—and that is true, both in pictures and words, although he naturally thinks in terms of panels rather than paragraphs. Pictorially, Gould has a comic-book genius for drawing grotesquely caricatured faces and heads and for inventing grotesquely Dickensian character-names[9] to match the faces and heads. And Gould's plots have all

the excitement and suspense of "thriller" fiction. So Dick Tracy is blood-brother in the royal line of fictional detectives, and an authentic "first" in the history of the form. Indeed, despite his 39 years of unceasing pursuit and punishment of criminals, Dick Tracy has not really aged—he remains forever young and "with it." In recent adventures he has even been blasting off into outer space, encapsulated in a spaceship, to trace down astro-crooks, thus anticipating what could be the next major development in the mystery field—the blending of science fiction and detective fiction, a "wedding of genres" (to use the phrase of Allen J. Hubin, mystery critic of *The New York Times*). But then, as we have proved, Dick Tracy has been "anticipating" ever since his birth in print 39 years ago—Chester Gould, always proud of his ahead-of-the-times viewpoint, once said, "I try to anticipate things."

Now join Dick Tracy in some of his danger-packed, breathtaking, hair's-breadth adventures and escapes—Dick Tracy versus Organized Crime—Dick Tracy slugged, pistol-whipped, tortured, burned, beaten, frozen, chloroformed, gassed, near-drowned, knocked out, pressurized, de-pressurized, dynamited, dragged by a car at 60 miles an hour, stabbed, shot (by actual count, 27 bullet wounds in the first 24 years), mangled and crushed (especially his shooting hand), victim of concussions, fractures (usually compound), cracked ribs, dislocated hip—in the course of 39 years of crimebusting, a veritable encyclopedia of harrowing experiences, "grisly business," "gruesome, sinister, fiendish havoc" (a combination of Chester Gould's own words), and impossible-to-get-out-of predicaments ("hot spots")—Tracy was once sealed in paraffin and has often been buried alive ("It's curtains—I'm sunk!"). Dick Tracy, the scourge of law-breakers, the terror of the underworld, the nemesis of crime and evil, whose philosophy is: "Little crimes lead to big crimes" and "crime does not pay." Dick Tracy, the indestructible man.

*Sic durat gloria mundi.*

*Ellery Queen*



## ENDNOTES

[1] One week later, on October 12, 1931, Dick Tracy made his debut in the New York *Daily News*. His first appearance in the *Chicago Tribune* was delayed until March 22, 1932.

[2] Dick Tracy's comic-strip forerunners[2a] included Eddie Eks's Alex the Cop, Hugh Doyle's Mr. Wiseguy the Detective, and Gus Mager's Hawkshaw the Detective, the last a burlesque of Sherlock Holmes complete with magnifying glass, pipe, Sherlockian garb, and farcical deductions. *Après* Dick Tracy *le déluge:* here are some of the many comic-strip detectives who followed in Tracy's footsteps: Lyman Anderson's Inspector Wade; Eddie Sullivan's and Charlie Schmidt's Pinkerton, Jr. (retitled Radio Patrol, later called Sergeant Pat of Radio Patrol); Alexander Gillespie Raymond's and Dashiell Hammett's Secret Agent X-9 (the agent's name was Phil Corrigan); Frank E. Leonard's Mickey Finn (about the family life of a detective); Alfred Andriola's Charlie Chan, and later, Kerry Drake; Ray Bailey's Bruce Gentry (an airline detective); Alex Raymond's Rip Kirby (a gentleman action-detective); and let us not forget Al Capp's Fearless Fosdick, a parody of Dick Tracy (once Fearless Fosdick, in an unsuccessful attempt to arrest a balloon vendor for not having a license, killed 42 people!). To say nothing of the Western-type detectives like Fran Striker's and Charles Flanders' The Lone Ranger and James Guilford Swinnerton's Rocky Mason, Government Marshal; and another offshoot, Allen Dean's King of the Royal Mounted; and such "superdetectives" designed to "instill fear into the hearts of the underworld" like Jerry Siegel's and Joe Shuster's Superman, Bob Kane's Batman and Robin, and Bert Whitman's The Green Hornet.

[2a] The world's first fictional detective, Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin (1841), had his forerunners too: among them, Daniel (in the Bible), Voltaire's Zadig (1747), William Leggett's Jim Buckhorn (1827), François Eugène Vidocq (1828), and Charles Dickens' "officers from Bow Street," Blathers and Duff (1838).

[3] The commercial tie-ups include radios, watches, burglar-alarm and detective kits, masks, wallets, guns of various kinds, secret money pockets, flashlights, clothing of various kinds, cameras, binoculars, fountain pens, candy, puzzles, a Gravel Gertie banjo, a Sparkle Plenty doll ($3 million in sales the first year), Sparkle Plenty Christmas-tree lights—more than 60 different by-products. Imagine, Dick Tracy candy!

[4] If we correctly understand Stanley Burnshaw in his *The Seamless Web* (1970) and some of the authorities he quotes, the creation of a redeeming character is one of man's attempts to heal the alienation of man from the world, from his fellow-man, and from himself.

[5] Inflationary (and Cautionary) Note, 41 years later: without a cataclysmic crash "the value of shares on major exchanges was down about 300 billion dollars" in the past 18 months (*U.S. News & World Report*, June 8, 1970).

[6] Lest you forget the present: the F.B.I.'s 1969 statistics for the United States indicate one murder committed every 36 minutes, 9 serious crimes every minute, one auto theft every 36 seconds (seconds, not minutes), one larceny every 21 seconds, one burglary every 16 seconds. The 1969 crime rate was 11 per cent over 1968, and so far in 1970 the crime epidemic has been hitting new highs ("Serious reported crime increased 13 per cent the first quarter of 1970"—*The New York Times*, June 23, 1970).

[7] Is "artist" too strong a word? Pretentious? From Jack O'Brian's syndicated column of May 15, 1970: "The Museum of Modern Art bought several of Bob Kane's original 'Batman' drawings." Chester Gould's draftsmanship improved quickly: more interesting composition, more "shading," more "angle" shots; and as Gould's drawing became stronger, more confident, more authoritative, Dick Tracy as a character became stronger, more confident, more authoritative.

[8] Paraphrasing Stendhal: "A hardboiled detective-action story is a mirror riding the streets of a city"; or to use a quotation from Matthew Arnold, it is "a criticism of life."

# THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF DICK TRACY

DICK TRACY's first appearance was on Sunday, October 4, 1931 in the *Detroit Mirror*. This appearance was followed by another page on October 11 in the same newspaper. On Monday, October 12, 1931, the daily strip began in the *New York News*.

# THE FIRST EPISODE